Tyranny of Languages

Demand for New States

Escapism is not a virtue in politics. But Congress continues to adopt an escapist attitude towards the problem of linguistic states. At the Hyderabad session of Congress a resolution has been endorsed to the effect that "Any further step in the direction of re-organisation of states on the basis of language, or other basis, will naturally depend on the stabilisation of Andhra State". All the members of the Congress Working Committee do not support this policy of inaction. But, under Pandit Nehru’s pressure and influence, Congress has decided to postpone its decision on linguistic States in the hope that the campaign may subside in turn. Congress is hoping against hope.

It would be wrong to presume that demand for linguistic States is recent, although independence has revived it. Its origin is rooted deep in history. "At one time, in more or less distant past", the Dar Commission prefaced its investigation of the problem of linguistic States, "the areas in which these (Telugu, Marathi, etc) languages were spoken bore their names, and also formed sovereign states. Thus Andhra, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamilnad and Gujarat are the ancient names and areas of the states in which Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, Tamil and Gujarati languages were spoken. Vidarbha is the ancient name of modern Berar." .

From the time the British Raj assumed direct control over India from the East India Company until the end of the century the country was divided for administrative purposes into three main areas. There was Madras in the South. There was Bombay in the west. And the rest of India which was neither Bombay nor Madras, was grouped for administrative purposes with Bengal. By the beginning of this century, many new provinces were created. There was more than one reason for carving out NWF, Assam, Bihar, Sind and Orissa as new provinces. But it was at about this time that the need for linguistic States was conceded. Both the Mont-Ford Report and the Simon Report recommended the formation of provinces on a linguistic basis. Congress commitment to linguistic States can be traced back to 1921, when Congress Committees were formed, more or less, on the basis of linguistic area. In 1928 the Nehru Report endorsed the Congress demand for linguistic States.

Post-independence history of the campaign for linguistic States can be easily told. In the Constituent Assembly, on November 27, 1947, Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister, accepted on behalf of his Government the principle underlying the demand for linguistic States. In December, 1948, the Dar Commission, appointed by the Constituent Assembly submitted its report. It was against the creation of linguistic States, "in the larger interests of the Indian nation". It admitted the need for "new provinces" for administrative convenience. It conceded that "oneness of language" was a question to be taken into consideration when, and if, such "new provinces" were created, but that should not be the decisive or the main factor. In April, 1949, the Committee, composed of Sardar Patel, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru and Shri Pattabhi Sitaramayya, appointed by the Jaipur Congress submitted its report. The JVP Committee accepted the principle of linguistic States, but was against the creation of new states immediately. "Taking a broad and practical view, therefore", the JVP report concludes, "we feel that the present is not an opportune time for the formation of new provinces" .

Sardar Patel wrote a glorious chapter in India's history by integrating the former princely states with the Indian Union. That Chapter had an abrupt end. Later additions created more complications. Bombay is now an unwieldy state with the incorporation of Baroda, the Deccan and Gujerat States, and Kolhapur. Orissa and the Central Provinces have absorbed the Eastern States. Mysore, Travancore-Cochin and Hyderabad complicate the administrative problems of adjoining states. Integration created serious administrative problems. In North-Central and North-Western India the opportunity was seized to create new administrative units. Kathiawad States were grouped under Saurashtra. Patiala and East Punjab States were merged into Pepsu. Central Indian States were integrated into Madhya Bharat. In the south, in the north-east and in the west of India the opportunity was seized. The Dar Commission admitted that the integration of the former Indian States into the Indian Union, and merger of some of them with the existing states had created administrative problems needing action by the Centre. But it concluded that the time was not ripe for the creation of new states. The JVP Committee concurred with this conclusion.

Both the Dar Commission and the JVP Committee furnished some arguments against the linguistic States which are not no longer applicable. Rayalseema districts have no longer any objection, though the Dar Commission emphasised it, to co-operating with the coastal areas in forming a separate Andhra State. Travancore has now integrated with Cochin. And the advocates of United Kerala can no longer be told, as the Dar Commission told them, that Kerala could not come into being without the merger of Travancore-Cochin. With the Government's decision to form Andhra State out of Madras, the advocates of United Karnataka ran no longer be told that they must await formation of other linguistic States (that is Andhra) out of Madras before Madras could be further parcelled out to form United Karnataka.

There are still difficulties in the formation of linguistic States. Travancore-Cochin may not be eager to coalesce with Malabar to form United Kerala. United Karnataka must necessarily mean Mysore's merger with Coorg, and the Karnataka districts. Vishala Andhra, United Karnataka, and United Maharashtra raise the problem of contiguous linguistic areas of Hyderabad State. Mahavidarbha is not keen on joining Bombay Maharashtra. There is still lack of unanimity among the advocates of linguistic States. Some bilingual pockets will remain after the formation of linguistic States. There are many difficulties in the formation of Samyukta Maha-
The reason why Congress has decided, widely believed that the dismemberment of Hyderabad is a more serious problem. Congress hopes to delay its pledge of creating linguistic States in the hope that the advocates of linguistic States would appreciate the argument that immediate formation of such States would hamper the progress of the Five-Year Plan. But experience suggests that Congress is hoping against hope.

Arguments stressed in the resolution passed by the Hyderabad Congress confirm the real motive which weigh with Congress in postponing a decision on linguistic States. Economic and financial viability of such a State is relevant, but not an over-riding consideration. Advocates of linguistic States must be told firmly that they will have to pay in taxation the price for what they want. But it is difficult to appreciate how the creation of linguistic States can endanger "unity of Indian national security, and defence". There is the Army of the Indian Union to ensure the Republic's territorial integrity. There are the Federal Parliament, the Federal Government and the Supreme Court to maintain law and order. It is better to warn the advocates of linguistic States about what they can now hope to receive. To make linguistic States is not to accept the principle of multinationalism. Linguistic States are not anti-national. They are mere administrative units. On all vital, all-India issues the authority rests with New Delhi. Linguistic States are entitled to internal autonomy. They cannot have financial or political autonomy beyond that enjoyed by Part A States under the Constitution.

There have been occasions when some advocates of State Rights have openly challenged the authority of New Delhi. Constitutional experts are inclined to the view that the Constitution provides elaborate safeguards to ensure the Federal Government's supreme authority. Even so recent political developments suggest that the time may come to take a decision whether the Constitution needs suitable amendments to incorporate the unitary conception of the Republic. Evidently, the Congress has doubts that, despite its country-wide party organisation, it may not always expect disciplinary obedience from its rank and file in every part of the Union. No other political party has such a wide network of party organisation. It, therefore, becomes all the more necessary for constitutional experts to concentrate on fundamental problems like suitable modification of the Constitution, so that linguistic States can be formed without any evil consequences. Behaving like an ostrich does Congress no credit. Statesmanlike demands that the fundamental constitutional problems be solved with vigour and firmness, instead of adopting a policy of inaction in the pious hope that the campaign of linguistic States will subside.